



Since 1923

# TORONTO FIELD NATURALIST

Number 651 April 2020



American Redstart. Photo by Theresa Moore

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

April 22, 2020 marks the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day. When activist John McConnell first proposed the concept at a UNESCO conference in 1969, he suggested that it happen on March 21st each year. It was actually college students and academics who, in 1970, established the tradition of celebrating it on April 22 – the day after the birthday of John Muir, the "Father of America's National Parks." This choice seems deeply poignant today as we watch the current administration in the United States pave and plow their way through national parks to build their border wall. Closer to home, our neighbours to the west are looking to cut \$4 million from their provincial budget by "modernizing Alberta's parks system," a move expected to privatize management, in whole or in part, of over 150 nationally-beloved provincial parks.

The refrain that "every day should be Earth Day," no matter how accurate it may be in spirit, seems a bit glib and trite in practice. One can hardly catch a news cycle, or even look out your window for that matter, without recognizing that the Earth needs far more care than it's getting from us. We've taken this planet, and all the life on it, for granted for far too long. A yearly reminder of our obligation to act as stewards of this planet is, sadly, every bit as meaningful today as it was fifty years ago. So let this 50th celebration of Earth Day renew your commitment to making each day a little better for our natural world. With the arrival of spring, ways to take action in service of our natural heritage multiply.

Cleanups abound throughout April, such as those in Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve, High Park and German Mills Park, all of which will enjoy a strong TFN presence. For details on these events and several others, please see the "Celebrate Earth Day" feature on page 13 of this issue.

Citizen Science opportunities also start to ramp up in April. Look no further than TFN's own Cottonwood Flats Monitoring Project for ways to engage. Entering its fourth year, this project always benefits from participation by new volunteers. Learn more on our website or by contacting [cfmp@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:cfmp@torontofieldnaturalists.org).

From May to October, with Toronto's stewardship season then in full swing, pulling invasives and planting natives is



Phragmites removal at Beechwood, 2018.

Photo: Jason Ramsay-Brown

a focus of activity. TFN's Jim Baillie Nature Reserve Stewardship Team meets frequently to care for this amazing bit of wilderness along Uxbridge Creek. Email [stewardship@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:stewardship@torontofieldnaturalists.org) to get on the list. Closer to home, the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve Stewardship Team meets twice a week to care for that area, and volunteers will find TFN members aplenty there as well. For more information, contact Paula Davies (winner of this year's Agnes Macphail Award – congrats, Paula!) at [wildflowerpreserve@gmail.com](mailto:wildflowerpreserve@gmail.com). If neither of those fits your schedule, the City of Toronto's Community Stewardship Program runs eight teams across the city. Email [greentoronto@toronto.ca](mailto:greentoronto@toronto.ca) for more information.

We're lucky to live in a city that's intimately entwined with one of the world's largest urban forests. Torontonians have fantastic opportunities to connect with and care for nature, not just on Earth Day, but virtually year round. Make the most of it!

Jason Ramsay-Brown  
[president@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:president@torontofieldnaturalists.org)

## TFN OUTINGS

TFN events, conducted by unpaid volunteers, go rain or shine. Visitors and children accompanied by an adult are welcome. No pets please. TFN assumes no responsibility for injuries sustained by anyone participating in our activities. **Please thoroughly clean your footwear before each outing to avoid spreading invasive seeds.**

*The Toronto Field Naturalists wish to acknowledge this land through which we walk. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississauga of the Credit River. Today it is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to be on this land.*

**If you are viewing online, consider printing this page for your convenience.**

- Thur  
Apr 2  
10:00 am     **ASHBRIDGE'S BAY PARK – Birds, insects and plants**  
**Leader: Bob Kortright.** Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd E and Ashbridge's Bay Park Rd (continuation of Coxwell Ave) for a circular walk. We will walk the perimeter of the park from the remnant of Ashbridge's Bay past Coatsworth Cut, around the landfilled park and across Woodbine Beach to the Woodbine bus loop near a coffee shop. Gulls (Iceland?), waterfowl, and early land bird migrants. Signs of major project work to eliminate the need to dredge the harbour entrance and for the new outfall and landform for the sewage treatment plant. Mostly paved and fairly flat with washrooms at the end. Dress for windy lakeside conditions.
- Sat  
Apr 4  
1:00 pm     **THE DON VALLEY – Restoration and Citizen Science**  
**Leader: Jason Ramsay-Brown.** Meet at the corner of O'Connor Dr and Beechwood Dr. (To avoid the steep descent into the valley, use the public parking lot at the bottom of Beechwood Dr and wait for the group to pass by the Police Dog Kennels at 44 Beechwood Dr.) A 3-km circular walk visiting Beechwood and Cottonwood Flats, the site of an ongoing TFN ecological monitoring program and the city's newest wetland. Discover how the industrial legacy of the Don Valley has been transformed into natural heritage. No washrooms or water fountains.
- Wed  
Apr 8  
10:00 am     **COLONEL SAMUEL SMITH PARK – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Charles Bruce-Thompson.** Meet at the southwest corner of Kipling Ave and Lake Shore Blvd W for a circular walk to see the last remnants of winter and the first signs of spring, both vegetal and avian. Morning only.
- Sat  
Apr 11  
1:30 pm     **MIMICO CREEK – Heritage and Nature**  
**Leader: Ed Freeman.** Meet at the bus stop opposite Bishop Allen Academy, Coney Rd and Royal York Rd, for a linear walk to Mimico Village and Sanremo Bakery. Mostly paved surfaces but some slopes and unpaved trail.
- Wed  
Apr 15  
10:00 am     **LYNDE SHORES – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Stephen Kamnitzer.** Meet at the Lynde Shores Conservation Area parking lot, 1285 Victoria St W, Whitby for a 3- to 4-hr walk. Bring lunch and coins for parking fee. For information about Lynde Shores visit <https://www.cloca.com/lynde-shores-ca> If you're driving, take 401 east to Salem Rd south exit (#404). Drive south for 1 km, turn left onto Bayly St (regional road 22), and 3 km to the conservation area. If you need a ride, Stephen will meet you at Whitby GO station. Contact him at 416-733-0840 or 647-924-0840 (cell), or email [stephen.kamnitzer@gmail.com](mailto:stephen.kamnitzer@gmail.com).

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### WHAT'S NEW ON TFN'S WEBSITE

Discover all this and more at <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/for-members/>

- Metrolinx GO Expansion in the Don Valley
- City Nature Challenge
- Celebrate Earth Day (expanded listing)

Plus: Notes from our latest Junior Naturalists events, opportunities to Take Action, and much more.

## SURCHARGE FOR MAILED NEWSLETTER

The TFN Board of Directors is pleased to announce that the surcharge required to receive the printed and mailed version of our newsletter will stay at \$25 for the 2020/2021 membership period. Our ability to maintain this pricing remains largely due to the great generosity of a TFN member who donated a total of \$10,000 over two years to establish our Mailed Newsletter Fund, and the subsequent donations made to this fund by other members. Without these donations, a surcharge increase this year would have been unavoidable.

The annual cost to provide the printed and mailed newsletter is approximately \$35 per membership, covering eight issues. At a Special Meeting held at Emmanuel College on May 6, 2018 (see TFN 635-5), the membership voted to adopt a Board proposal that standardized membership fees and introduced a \$30 annual surcharge to cover the costs of the mailed newsletter for those who

wished to receive it. Our Mailed Newsletter Fund, however, allowed us to implement the 2018/2019 surcharge at only \$15, and to transition to the current surcharge of only \$25 for 2019/2020. The Mailed Newsletter Fund remains active and members are invited to contribute during 2020/2021 renewals.

All TFN members are entitled to receive the digital version of the newsletter simply by paying the standard membership fees and providing TFN with your email address. The surcharge is only incurred by those members who opt to also receive a printed and mailed copy.

Should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at [president@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:president@torontofieldnaturalists.org).

Jason Ramsay-Brown

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**Make sure we have your email address  
so you can view the outings list online before receipt of your paper copy.**

- Sat  
Apr 18  
8:30 am     **TORONTO ISLANDS – Photography**  
**Leader: Zunaïd Khan.** Take the 8:45 am ferry to Ward’s Island to meet the leader on arrival for a circular walk around Ward’s Island and Snake Island, ending back at the ferry dock. You can buy ferry tickets online to save time. Mostly flat surfaces. Washrooms available. Approximately 2 to 3 hrs.
- Sun  
Apr 19  
2:00 pm     **ETOBICOKE CREEK & CENTENNIAL PARK – Lost Rivers Earth Week Walk**  
**Leader: Brian MacLean and others.** Meet at bus stop in front of Seneca School (580 Rathburn Rd at Centennial Park Rd). Renforth bus #48 from Royal York subway station. Parking available at Seneca School and shopping plaza opposite. A 2-hr, 4-km circular walk on unpaved surfaces, flat with some gentle slopes. Washrooms available. Joint outing with Toronto Green Community.
- Thurs  
Apr 23  
10:00 am     **COLONEL SAMUEL SMITH PARK – Birds**  
**Leader: David Creelman.** Meet at the southwest corner of Lake Shore Blvd W and Kipling Ave. Mostly flat surfaces on good trails and grass. Dress warmly with layers as it can be chilly and breezy by the lake. Bring binoculars. A 2-hr walk (or longer if birding is good). TTC is nearby for any who need to leave early. Washrooms at the beginning, at the Student Welcome Centre, 2nd floor, and possibly along the way.
- Sat  
Apr 25  
10:00 am     **GERMAN MILLS PARK – Nature Walk and Litter Cleanup**  
**Leader: Theresa Moore.** Meet at the northeast corner of Leslie St and Steeles Ave E for a circular walk. Bags will be provided. We will likely see spring wildflowers and birds.
- Sun  
Apr 26  
10:00 am     **TAYLOR CREEK PARK – Nature Walk**  
**Leader: Leila Lessem.** Meet outside Victoria Park subway station for a 2-hr circular walk to explore the park’s woodland tracks and two wetland areas. Some paved and dirt trails with little hills. Bring binoculars. No washrooms.
- Thurs  
Apr 30  
10:00 am     **ALLAN GARDENS CONSERVATORY AND PARK – Plants**  
**Leaders: Diana Teal and Nancy Dengler.** Meet inside the main entrance of the Conservatory for a walk through the greenhouse plant collection. We’ll hear about current work of the Friends of Allan Gardens and plans for the conservatories and park, as well as plant adaptations for tropical and semi-tropical conditions. Washrooms available. Dress in layers for warm temperatures indoors.

**Share your favourite walk photos on social media, hashtag #TFNWalk.**

## LECTURE REPORT

## “There Are No Flying Squirrels in Ontario” and Other Myths

March 1, 2020

Dr. Jeff Bowman, Senior Research Scientist, Wildlife Research and Monitoring, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Adjunct Professor, Environmental and Life Sciences Graduate Program, Trent University

Dr. Jeff Bowman has been with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry since 2001. He began studying flying squirrels in 2002 in a forest north of Peterborough. This Kawartha Lakes forest is known across the world for flying squirrels, with people filming from Germany for *Fascination Earth*, CBC for *The Nature of Things*, Discovery Channel, BBC and local news organizations.

A famous flying squirrel is the cartoon character, Rocky, best friend of Bullwinkle. Also, the late Ernest P. Walker, author of *Mammals of the World*, raised a pair of flying squirrels as pets and wrote about his experience in the National Geographic magazine in 1947.

Flying squirrels do not actually fly, but glide from one tree to another using the flaps of skin that stretch between their wrists and ankles. They can turn quite sharply using their long tail, which acts as a rudder for steering. A flying squirrel can glide up to three times its height. So, if it is 50 meters up a tree, it can glide for 150 meters. Gliding allows the squirrels to efficiently travel across forests to access dispersed food. They are nocturnal and use ultrasonic vocalizations for communication. Owls, their main predator, cannot hear ultrasound.

There are 50 types of flying squirrels including three species in North America.

- The northern and southern flying squirrels can be seen in Ontario. The northern has grey belly fur and is almost twice as big as the southern. Northern flying squirrels depend on conifer forests and the fungus

associated with them. The southern flying squirrel, which has white belly fur, eats acorns and nuts and can live in hardwood and mixed wood forests.

- The Humboldt's flying squirrel found in California is smaller and darker than the northern flying squirrels.

Many of the other flying squirrel species are from southern Asia. Notable flying squirrel varieties include:

- The dwarf flying squirrel (the smallest), located in Japan, can grow up to 20 cm.
- The red giant flying squirrel, the largest, can grow up to 55 cm.
- The woolly flying squirrel, located in Pakistan, has long thick fur and can also grow quite large (up to 54 cm). It feeds on pine needles producing crystalline urine which is claimed to be an aphrodisiac.

Due to climate change, southern flying squirrels have been seen as far north as Temagami in northeastern Ontario, which is 200 km outside of their expected range limit. During winter, flying squirrels nest together for warmth in small holes within tree trunks. This need for social nesting and the movement of southern flying squirrels into the habitat of northern flying squirrels have promoted hybridization between the species.



Photo by former Trent University graduate student Michael Brown

Approximately 4% of squirrels in central Ontario are hybrid.

It has been observed that the northern and southern flying squirrels produce a fluorescent pink belly when black light is shone on them. Non-flying squirrels do not fluoresce under UV light.

Dr. Jeff Bowman and his team continue to study flying squirrels. There are still many unanswered questions such as why flying squirrels have fluorescent bellies, issues with increased hybridization and how climate change will affect them.

Thanks, Jeff, for sharing your interesting studies!

Laura Thompson

## CONGRATULATIONS TO PAULA DAVIES

Hearty congratulations to TFN member Paula Davies, co-winner of the 2020 Agnes Macphail Award for her work as Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve activist. The awards ceremony will take place at the East York Civic Centre on Sunday, March 29.

As reported in the East York Chronicle on February 26th, Paula has been active in environmental stewardship since the late 1980s, beginning with the City of Toronto Task Force to Bring Back the Don, the East York Environmental Advisory Committee and, in 1991, forming the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve (TMWP) along with noted environmentalist Charles Sauriol and horticulturist Dave Money. TMWP, a registered charity under her direction, is actively restoring forest, wetlands and meadows at the 22-acre (9.2 hectare) park. To learn more about the Todmorden Wildflower Preserve, visit: <http://www.hopscotch.ca/tmwp/preserve/index.html>



As you can see from this photo, a number of TFN members enthusiastically join Paula in the restoration work at the Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve.

Starting third from left: Vivienne Denton, Ken Sproule, Charles Bruce-Thompson, Paula Davies, Lise Beaupre and Jane Cluver.

## REMEMBERING CAROL SELLERS

We are saddened by the news that Carol Sellers passed away on February 25th following a heart attack.

Carol was a valued member of Toronto Field Naturalists since 1988 and, over the years, led many popular outings focusing on birds and butterflies. She took a particular interest in insects, describing herself as a “bug person.” Encouraged by Helen Juhola, she joined the Toronto Entomologists’ Association and became very knowledgeable in this field. Carol was the “go to” person whenever the Newsletter team needed to identify an insect. She contributed helpful reviews of books relating to butterflies and other insects as well as a fascinating article about dragonflies and damselflies in the December 2006 issue (<https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2006-12-TFN-Newsletter.pdf>).

Many TFN members have benefitted from her enthusiasm and knowledge. She will be sorely missed.



## TORONTO'S NATIVE PURSLANES AND RELATIVES

The Portulacaceae (purslane family) is a small family of about 20 to 30 genera and 500 species. Its major diversity is in the Andes and South Africa. The genus *Claytonia* is widespread in North America and includes two species occurring in Toronto, *C. virginica* (narrow-leaved spring-beauty) and *C. caroliniana* (Carolina spring-beauty). For comparison I have included two western North American species, *C. sibirica* from B.C.'s coastal rainforest and *C. tuberosa*, a tundra species from the Yukon interior.

*C. virginica*, locally common, and *C. caroliniana*, locally rare, both have flowers in open racemes each with up to 15 flowers. The flowers, up to 25 mm wide, consist of five tepals with two green bracts. They are white, or pale pink, with darker pink stripes. The stripes are insect guides to nectar (*The ROM Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario*, 2004). These species can be easily distinguished from each other by elongate stalkless leaves in *C. virginica* and lance-shaped leaves with a short stalk in *C. caroliniana*.

Both are forest species blooming in the spring before the trees leaf out. The TFN's *Vascular Plants of Metropolitan Toronto* (1994, 2nd ed.) recorded *C. caroliniana* only in the East Don watershed and the Rouge valley. Subsequently it has been found in Wexford Woods (Don watershed) and L'Amoreaux Park (Highland Creek). This is the more widespread species in Ontario, recorded across the province except the far north and far west. Its full range is most of eastern North America while *C. virginica*'s full range is Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and the eastern half of the U.S. (U.S. Department of Agriculture Plants database).

The next time you see spring-beauty in Toronto forests on an early spring walk, check out the leaves. If you find *C. caroliniana*, please report it to TFN.

Article and photos by Peter Money



From top:  
Narrow-leaved spring-beauty (*Claytonia virginica*)  
and close-up;  
Carolina spring-beauty (*C. caroliniana*)



From Left:  
Siberian miner's lettuce (*C. sibirica*)  
;Beringian spring-beauty (*C. tuberosa*)

## TREE OF THE MONTH: BALSAM FIR (*ABIES BALSAMEA*)

One of our most shade-tolerant conifers, balsam fir, seeds readily into closed canopy forests on moist soils and can remain in the understory for decades, often preserving the perfectly conical shape that recommends it as a cut holiday tree. This growth form is just one of many typical pine family traits that balsam fir (along with many other species of *Abies*) displays especially clearly. The symmetrically conical form is produced by regular annual tiers of nearly strictly horizontal branches, referred to as pseudo-whorls because they form a very shallow spiral, like a slice out of a Slinky, rather than a true whorl in the form of a closed ring, like a car tire. Each branch, in turn, expands by even annual horizontal trifurcations so that the oldest, lowest branches stretch out beyond successively younger ones.

The impression of conical perfection is enhanced because the flat needles of young trees also extend out horizontally straight to the sides, unlike spruces in which they almost fully encircle the twigs. A prominent waxy white band of stomata flanks the midrib on the underside of each needle, while the uppersides are a solid dark green unbroken by these essential breathing pores. In older trees, especially in their upper canopy, the appearance of a flat sheet of foliage is blunted because needles curl up and fill the space above the twig.

The seed cones, nestled in the cozy bed of needles in the upper canopy, are more prominent than those of pines or spruces because they stand up straight above the twigs as plump, rigid cylinders. In this exposed position, their deep purple colour before ripening may both help them keep warm by absorbing sunlight and protect them from UV radiation. Their prominence, confined to the tops of the trees in most years, particularly emphasizes their spatial separation from the pollen cones that, as in most conifers, are borne in the lower crown. Hence, pollen cannot fall directly onto seed cones of the same tree but is wafted away by wind to neighbouring or more distant trees.

The seed cones are also unusual, not only among members of the pine family but also among conifers more generally. When the seeds are shed, so too are the seed scales, leaving behind the sharp, spindle-like central cone axes which can persist for several years providing a record of reproductive effort. The shedding of seed scales is typical in that minority of other conifers with upright woody cones, such as true cedars and kauris. You might think that the flattened, aerodynamic seed scales help with wind dispersal of the seeds, but it is more likely that they are simply getting out of the way. With hanging or drooping seed cones, like those of pines or spruces, the seeds drop out from between the scales by gravity before the wind catches their wings; this cannot happen with an upright cone.

*Continued on next page*



Top: Purple seed cones at top of tree  
 Above: Seed cones with persistent axes after shedding scales  
 Left: Pollen cones and needles  
 Next page: Bark with resin blisters and streaks of resin  
 Photos: Ron Dengler

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE: ZUNAID KHAN

Originally from South Africa, Zunaïd Khan moved to Toronto when he was 11 years old and has lived in the City for most of his life. “I spent most of my career in technology or digital media,” says Zunaïd, “and have done multiple tech start-ups.” However, a growing disillusionment with this industry led him to reconsider his career after 20 years. “I always had an interest in nature and photography, so I said, ‘Forget it! I’m going to just restructure what I do for a living so I can pursue photography.’” Leveraging his years in business and digital marketing, Zunaïd now works for a nature products company and as a freelance consultant for smaller businesses that provide creative services. “This gives me the flexibility to spend as much time in nature as possible.”

Zunaïd’s passion for nature photography led him to TFN. “When I first started digging into it, I was kind of overwhelmed by how much I had to learn, both technically in terms of the camera and also my subject.” The more time he spent shooting, the more Zunaïd’s interest in his subject grew. He says, “I was looking for a source for information and then an organization to learn about native plant and wildlife species.” It was the TFN walks that initially hooked him, but the more he learned, the more he wanted to get involved. “I decided to pursue my passion, and conservation has become a big part of that.”



Since joining TFN in 2018, Zunaïd has become an integral part of the organization. He first began volunteering as a proof-reader for the newsletter and, since then, contributes regularly through a column that gives photography tips to TFN members, including topics such as Ethical Bird Photography and Taking Photos in Cold Weather. Now a walk leader himself, Zunaïd is excited to be leading four photography walks this coming year and is willing to share some of his favourite locations with TFN members!

TFN is thrilled that Zunaïd has joined the Board of Directors as Vice-President as well as Chair of Promotions and Outreach. With his background in technology and marketing, Zunaïd will be working to support and expand TFN’s role in creating the next generation of conservationists. Zunaïd sees TFN’s strength in education and connecting people with nature in the City and “just getting people to realize there are all these green spaces in the city they love living in.” Zunaïd shares a story from his first art show. “People were asking me ‘That’s an amazing shot, where is that?’ and I’d say ‘Humber Bay, and everything was within the City.’” He adds, “The rewarding aspect for me is having a positive impact on green space within the City.”

Agneta Szabo

### BALSAM FIR *continued*



Members of the pine family are noted for being highly resinous (and flammable!), and the position of resin canals in the needles can be helpful in identifying vegetative specimens. Resin is found in many parts of the plant, however, and balsam fir is both notoriously sticky and celebrated for the prominent resin blisters on the otherwise unusually smooth and featureless bark. The resin in these blisters is the fragrant Canada balsam that gives the species its name. Before the development of synthetic resins, pure, clear Canada balsam proved to be the perfect material for mounting specimens on microscope slides. Its refractive index is virtually identical to glass, minimizing distortion in viewing.

While most prominent in the boreal forest zone and essentially absent from the deciduous forest zone, balsam fir is common in forests in and around Toronto and is sometimes cultivated in cemeteries, parks and residential yards throughout.

James Eckenwalder

## EXTRACTS FROM OUTINGS LEADERS' REPORTS

### Plants, University of Toronto Plant Growth Facilities, Jan 15. Leaders: Bill Cole and Thomas Gludovacz.

Bill and Thomas first guided us through the four greenhouses that hold the hundreds of plant species used for teaching at U of T. The xerophyte house held many examples from the cactus, euphorb and milkweed families of parallel evolution in arid environments. In the palm house we noted coconut palms, cocoa tree, black pepper vine and the prickly-stemmed sandbox (or "monkey-no-climb") tree. The temperate house was filled with the scent of a flowering grapefruit, and the tropical house yielded two different kinds of ant plants (that provide housing and food for ants in return for defence) and a scarab fern with an iridescent blue sheen.

Bill next guided us through some of the research greenhouses, including projects related to the evolution of C4 photosynthesis, competition among native grassland species (including pollinating bees!), evolution of self-pollination and out-crossing pollination in the pickerel weed family, evolution of wind pollination in meadow rues, and evolution of sex chromosomes in docks.

**Leslie Street Spit, Jan 25. Leader: Charles Bruce-Thompson.** Despite a gloomy weather prediction, eight intrepid members and a couple of non-members showed up. Even more surprisingly, they all lasted the entire three hours! Because of the weather, the terrestrial birds wisely kept under cover. We saw only tree sparrows and cardinals. We saw evidence of beaver activity; also many

fresh signs, in the form of scat and paw prints, of coyotes. We saw Red-breasted Mergansers, scaup, White-winged Scoters, long-tails, American Black Ducks, Gadwall, numerous Redheads, Common Goldeneyes and one Great Black-backed Gull. A bevy of about 25 Trumpeter Swans huddled near the bridge.

### Birds, Toronto Island, Jan 30. Leader: Anne Powell.

Highlights of the walk included a Merlin, a group of Black Scoters close to shore and a curious mink. Nineteen bird species were observed, including White-winged Scoters, goldeneye, Red-breasted Mergansers, Long-tailed Ducks, Greater Scaup, Blue Jays, Downy Woodpeckers and an American Tree Sparrow.

### West Toronto Rail Path, Feb 6. Leader: Linda McCaffrey.

The Junction Triangle is bounded by three railway lines and, until the 1970s, was characterized by heavy industry and modest housing, originally for English and Scottish workers, superseded by Italian, Polish and Macedonian workers who

flooded in after the Second World War. The Portuguese population who succeeded them are now giving way as the neighbourhood gentrifies. Some lovely old industrial buildings survive and have been converted to commercial and residential uses. The ten-storey Tower Automotive Building was the highest building in Toronto in 1912. We spotted a Peregrine Falcon on a window ledge and a Cooper's Hawk in the vicinity of Wallace Avenue.



Merlin (female), Bluffer's Park, April, 2014. Photo: Ken Sproule

*Continued on page 12*

## UPCOMING JUNIOR NATURALISTS EVENTS

Children age 6-14 years and accompanied by an adult are invited to join TFN Junior Naturalists events. Hikes, games and activities will take place on the following Saturdays from 10 am to 12 noon. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, your curiosity and your sense of adventure. Junior Naturalists will receive an email with meet-up locations a few days prior to the event. To join, please contact [juniortfn@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:juniortfn@torontofieldnaturalists.org).

April 4 Join us on the Meadoway for a morning of birding by song with Emily Rondel, renowned Toronto Birder and TRCA's Meadoway Outreach co-ordinator. Learn to recognize early migrants by song and see what's happening on Toronto's new Pollinator Pathway.

## JUNIOR NATURALISTS

### Anishnabaag make Maple Syrup

There is nothing like a Saturday morning pancake and bacon breakfast - especially if there is lots of maple syrup to pour on the pancakes!

Maple syrup is a home-grown treat. It is made right here in Ontario, from the sap of sugar maple trees, in March and early April. Everyone loves to visit a 'sugar bush' to watch maple sap being boiled down and turned into the wonderful treat we enjoy on our pancakes.

Modern sugar bushes have tubes running from tree to tree to collect the sap and an evaporator which makes the process of boiling down the sap very efficient. Often sugar bushes, such as Kortright Conservation area, have a display showing the traditional way of making maple syrup. There will be a big open fire with large iron pots hanging over the fire. As the very thin sap thickens through boiling, it is transferred to another pot, until it is ready to be poured into sealed jars - or given to visitors as free samples!

The Anishnabaag (Ojibwe), one of the First Peoples of Ontario, made maple syrup before the settler peoples came here. A story of Nanaboozhoo, their legendary trickster, has him pouring water into the birch tree to thin the sap because the native people were eating too much of the rich, thick sap and getting lazy!

The Anishnabaag made spiles (tubes) out of hollow sumac or elderberry stems to channel the dripping sap. Tightly sealed, drip-proof birch bark containers were set at the base of trees to catch the sap.

When it came to boiling down the thin sap, how did the Anishnabaag manage without iron kettles? This always mystified me.

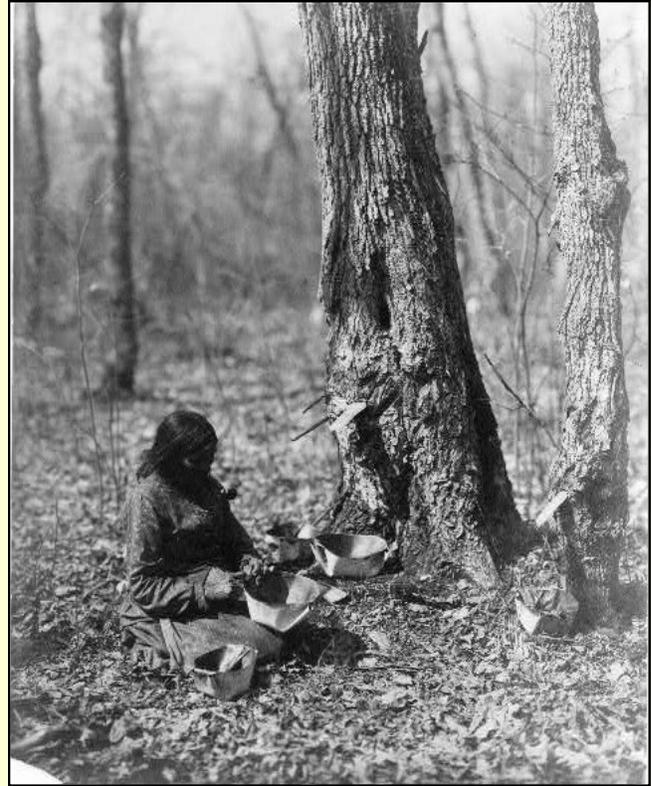


Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress, Roland Reed 1908 (no copyright) Toronto4Kids website 2013

First, according to the latest research, it is unlikely that they were able to boil the sap for long enough at high temperatures to turn maple syrup into maple sugar. On the other hand, birch containers are quite resistant to burning if they are made inside out, i.e., orange side out, held above a fire rather than in it, and contain liquid. Sap could therefore simmer in birch containers to the syrup stage. Hot rocks may have been added to hasten this process.

Sap can also be concentrated by allowing it to freeze and then partially melt. The first sap to melt contains most of the sugar, so the remaining chunk of ice can be thrown out. It is thought the Anishnabaag knew this trick and [re-froze the sap](#) a couple of times before starting to boil it down.

Anne Purvis

EXTRACTS *Continued from page 10*

Dark-eyed Junco. Photo: Ken Sproule

**Earl Bales Park and the West Don Valley, Feb 8.**

**Leader: Stephen Smith.** It was a cold but beautifully sunny winter day. Earl Bales Park is the former York Downs golf course that was taken over by the City in the 1960s. During the past 30 years many projects have been carried out to restore natural habitats and clean urban storm water runoff. The forest has many old trees. We discussed the hydrology of the area and history of the lands before they were parkland, and toured reforested areas and the storm water pond. We saw a tree sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-tailed Hawk, squirrels and a coyote. Notable plants seen included American plum, American chestnut, butternuts and abundant black walnuts.

**Lost Rivers, Natural and Human heritage, Lower Don Lands, Feb 16. Leader: John Wilson.**

We explored the changes in urban form and ecology, recognizing Indigenous presence on Wonscotonach (Don River) and the contributions of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, 19th century African-Canadian community-builders whose home stood at our rallying point. We discussed the industrial past of the area while observing land-use changes. West Don Lands is becoming a successful, complete, master-planned community. It includes new affordable and supportive housing, community-health institutions, townhouses, mid- and high-rise market-oriented housing and award-winning, re-naturalized Corktown Common Park. Its success is challenged by new developments – Gardiner Expressway rebuild, Ontario Line and "Smart Track" planning – but its accessibility to the Lower Don River trail system remains a major benefit. We remarked on the ongoing flood protection project of the Lower Don and Port Lands.

**Lower Don Trail to Corktown Common and Distillery, Feb 20. Leader: Vivienne Denton.** The path along the Don River from Riverdale Park south, squeezed between the Parkway and the railway lines, would not seem to be a favourable place for wildlife. However, even on a cold winter's day, there is life to be found. Around Broadview subway station, House Sparrows and pigeons gathered, and at the north end of Riverdale Park a hopeful cardinal sang atop a tall tree. On the river we saw lots of Mallards, a couple of gulls, a pair of swans and a number of Common Mergansers. We toured the native plantings and small wetland of Corktown Common, frozen and brown in its winter state but promising interesting plants and wildlife habitat in spring.



Red-bellied Woodpecker. Photo: Bill Cruttwell

**Scarborough Bluffs and Chine Ravine, Feb. 29. Leader Charles Bruce-Thompson.**

Given the bitterly cold weather and six inches of snow, I was surprised and gratified to see a good number of hardy TFN members show up for leap year day. They were rewarded almost immediately by a good sighting of a Red-bellied Woodpecker, followed by two other woodpecker species: Hairy and Downy. We also saw a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk in hot – if clumsy – pursuit of a squirrel. Later we saw, or heard, a White-breasted Nuthatch, goldfinches and numerous cardinals making an early, musical claim to their territories. As we walked in uninterrupted brilliant sunshine, the view from the top of the bluffs over Bluffer's Park and the lake was spectacular. The steep walk back up Midland Ravine ensured that we were all nice and warm by the end of the walk.

## CELEBRATE EARTH DAY

Sat Apr 18, 10 am to noon. **Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve (TMWP) Cleanup.** Join the TMWP Stewardship Team and TFNers aplenty for the annual cleanup of this amazing natural area. All equipment and materials will be provided. Meet by the entrance to the Preserve south of the historic buildings (67 Pottery Rd).

Sun Apr 19, 10 am to 5 pm. **Colborne Lodge, High Park. The BIG Earth, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Hosted by Laura McCallum, Curator.** The event will feature various demos, hands-on activities and information regarding how we can protect our planet and, specifically, contribute to the health of our local area. TFN will have a table at this event from 11 am to 3 pm. Stop in for a visit if you are in the area.

Sun Apr 19, 9 am to 3 pm. **Colonel Samuel Smith Park 16th Annual Cleanup.** Family-friendly, everyone welcome. Park located at the base of Kipling Ave and Lake Shore Blvd W. Meet on the path east of the Lake Shore Yacht Club. Protect our urban green spaces by reducing garbage in the park and along the shoreline. Bring your own gloves and boots and dress for the weather. Garbage bags and water provided. Prizes, giveaways and community service hours. For more information contact: Alan Roy [alan.ace.roy@gmail.com](mailto:alan.ace.roy@gmail.com) or 416-937-4568.

Sat Apr 25, 10 am. **German Mills Park – Nature Walk and Litter Cleanup.** TFN walk leader, Theresa Moore. Meet at the northeast corner of Leslie St and Steeles Ave E for a circular walk and litter cleanup. Bags will be provided. We will likely see some spring wildflowers and birds.

Sun Apr 26, 10 am. **Glen Stewart Ravine Annual Spring Ravine Cleanup.** Meet at the Beech Ave entrance, just south of Kingston Rd. Snacks, bags and some gloves are provided. Please bring your own gloves if you have them and dress for the weather. Ravine can be muddy at that time of year.

Contact: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/131013903608644/> or [friendsofglenstewartravine@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofglenstewartravine@gmail.com).

Sun May 3, 10 am to 2 pm. **E T Seton Park “Don’t Mess with the Don” Cleanup.** Meet at the south parking lot, 71 Thorncliffe Park Dr. Bags and gloves provided, as well as fresh drinking water through H2OTO GO and light snacks. Participants are encouraged to bring a reusable container. In order to welcome volunteers of all ages and abilities, they have arranged for a shuttle to bring people up and down the steep park entrance road to the registration area.

## COMING EVENTS

If you plan to attend any of these events, we recommend that you contact the organizing group beforehand to confirm time and place.

### **Jim Baillie Memorial Bird Walks – Toronto Ornithological Club ([www.torontobirding.ca](http://www.torontobirding.ca))**

Aimed at the intermediate birder, but beginners also welcome. Free to the public.

- Sun Apr 5, 7:30 am to noon. South Peel Hotspots. Leader: Reuven Martin. Meet at Marie Curtis Park parking lot, off 42nd St south of Lake Shore Blvd. Outing may include Lakefront Promenade, Saddington Park, Rattray Marsh and Lakeside Park, driving between locations. Spring migrants.
- Sun Apr 19, 7:30 am to 1:30 pm. Oshawa Second Marsh. Leader: Justin Peter. Meet in the parking lot at the GM HQ in Oshawa. See website for directions. Little Gulls and other migrants.
- Thurs Apr 23, 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm. American Woodcock Display Appreciation at Leslie Street Spit. Leader: Justin Peter. Meet at the foot of Leslie St at Unwin Ave. Waterproof footwear recommended!
- Sat Apr 25, 7:30 am to 1:30 pm. Leslie Street Spit. Leaders: Bob Cumming, Garth Riley, John Carley. Meet at the foot of Leslie St at Unwin Ave. Bring lunch and wear appropriate footwear for the “wet woods.” Early spring migrants.
- Sun Apr 26, 7:30 am to noon. Humber Bay Park East. Leader: Howard Shapiro. Meet at the Humber Bay East parking lot. Spring migrants.

## WEATHER (THIS TIME LAST YEAR)

April 2019

April was slightly colder and wetter than normal, but much less cold than 2018. Warm weather during the period around Easter was bookended by cold spells at the beginning and end of the month. The warmest day was April 18th (Holy Thursday) when a warm front made it into the Toronto area late in the day and brought a temperature of 21.8° to Pearson Airport. (It was a couple of degrees cooler downtown nearer the lake.) The coldest day was the 1st, with a minimum of -5.5° at Pearson. However, chilly weather with snow flurries was noted as late as April 29th.

Mild to warm weather during the middle part of April meant that the month was only about 0.5° to 0.7° below normal. Pearson averaged 6.5°, while downtown averaged 7.1°. These would have been normal in the 1970s-80s but in 2019, after the relatively severe winter, it felt cold.

The impression of chilliness was enhanced by the prevalence of cloudy, windy conditions as Toronto lay just north of the main frontal zone dividing early warmth in the eastern USA from lingering wintry conditions in Ontario and Quebec. Rainfall was in the 80-95 mm range, about 10-25 mm above the long-term average.

Snowfall was not substantial, with only 0.4 cm recorded at Pearson. Nonetheless, the total winter snowfall for 2018-2019 was quite high at 139.1 cm. The 30-year average is 109.1 cm. This is the highest winter snowfall in ten years; 2008-09 had 153.7 cm. Most of the snow this winter fell between mid-January and late February, with a smaller but notable early-season contribution in November.

Gavin Miller

## ABOUT TFN

TFN is a charitable, non-profit organization.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### NEWSLETTER

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Members are encouraged to contribute letters, short articles and digital images. Please email to: [newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org)

**Submissions deadline for May issue: Apr 1**

### CONTACT US:

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Email: [office@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:office@torontofieldnaturalists.org)

See email addresses for specific queries at: <https://torontofieldnaturalists.org/about-tfn/contact-us/>

Address: 2 – 2449 Yonge St, Toronto M4P 2E7. The office is normally open 9:30 am to noon on Fridays.

**Note:** If you wish to drop by on Friday, please phone first to ensure that someone will be there.

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

### Mystery Goose

I saw this waterfowl on February 29 at the north end of Grenadier Pond where the Mallards usually hang out. I'm not sure what the white waterfowl is. It does not have black on the tail, so it's not a Ross's Goose or Snow Goose, and it doesn't seem to have the short bill of either of those. I'm curious what the TFN community thinks.

Brian Wendler



### Response:

I believe it is a domestic duck, although I wonder who is keeping ducks around Grenadier Pond! Most domestic ducks are derived from Mallards or Muscovy Ducks, and this one looks to have the shape and size of a Mallard.

Bob Kortright

### Birds in the City

I am always amazed to see birds other than pigeons and House Sparrows surviving in the urban jungle away from large parks and ravines. Over the last few months I've seen a Hermit Thrush at the Bay Street bank towers hopping around the grass where the cow sculptures are; a Brown Creeper working its way up a small (about 10 cm diameter) street tree at Church and Gould; and a pair of Peregrine Falcons hunting pigeons between the domed stadium and the aquarium. One was swooping from a great height. Fresh pigeon feathers remained in evidence. Stopping to eat my lunch in a tiny parkette near a busy street allowed me to spot a White-throated Sparrow in a bush, while the sweet song of House Finches helped locate these colourful birds that can often be seen in the city core where yards are minute and parks far away.

Jenny Bull

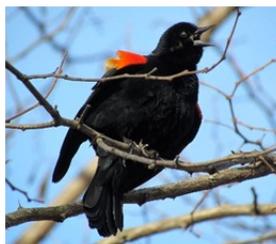


Hermit Thrush. Photo: Ken Sproule

### Oh to be in High Park, now that April's here!

Early signs of spring – migrating birds returning and the first wildflowers blooming – always give us a thrill. Each time we go out, there is something new to enjoy!

These are some of the delights I associate with spring in High Park: Male Red-winged Blackbirds noisily claiming their territories in the marsh on Grenadier Pond, followed shortly by the females; stunning male Wood Ducks pairing up with the elegant females; the first coltsfoot poking up among leaf litter; a patch of bloodroot providing a daily display near the pond, and a blaze of scilla on the slopes above.



Wishing you all an exciting springtime in your favourite parks! Please “KEEP IN TOUCH” by writing to tell us what you see and sharing your photos. Send submissions to: [newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:newsletter@torontofieldnaturalists.org).

Wendy Rothwell (Editor)

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## TFN LECTURE .....VISITORS WELCOME

Sunday, April 5, 2:30 pm (Social, 2 pm)

### Invading the Urban Ecosystem: Mechanisms, Impact and Management of Dog-strangling Vine

*Stuart Livingstone, Lecturer: Dept of Physical and Environmental Sciences, University of Toronto-Scarborough and Post-doctoral Researcher: Dept of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Toronto, will discuss the science of invasive species management including mechanisms driving the spread of DSV across the GTA.*



Emmanuel College, Room 001, 75 Queen's Park Cres E. Just south of Museum subway station exit, east side of Queen's Park. Accessible entrance second door south on Queen's Park. Elevator inside to the right. Room 001 is one floor below street level. For information: call 416-593-2656 up to noon on the Friday preceding the lecture.

#### **Upcoming lecture:**

May 3 Paul Zammit, Toronto Botanical Garden.

Re-thinking Beauty: Inspiring Gardeners in a Changing World